



Artists Spotlight Alaskan Wilderness

By Tim Lydon

Throughout 2014, Alaskans can celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act with artistic flair. The *Voices of the Wilderness Traveling Art Exhibit* is a collection of paintings, photographs, sculptures, poetry, and other works created by professional artists and inspired by Alaska's expansive 56 million acres of federal wilderness. The exhibit will tour seven Alaska communities during 2014, including Juneau, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Sitka, Homer, Kenai, and Ketchikan.

In all, twenty of Alaska's thirty-nine federal wilderness areas are represented, spanning the state. The works include a wood-carved paddle by Tlingit artist Donald Frank, whose home village of Angoon lies adjacent to Admiralty Island National Monument on the Tongass National Forest. Other highlights come from Gates of the Arctic National Park, Glacier Bay National Park, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, and the Chugach National Forest wilderness study area in Prince William Sound.

Much of the work was produced through artist residencies hosted by the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the last five years. Each work is accompanied by an artist's statement about their experiences in Alaskan wilderness, along with a placard and map highlighting the area's features.

Figure 1. As a 2012 artist-in-residence, Susan Watkins of Eagle River, Alaska, paints at Pakenham Point, College Fjord. Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area, Chugach National Forest.

Photo courtesy of Barbara Lydon

"For generations, artists have connected Americans to their public lands," says Barbara Lydon, U.S. Forest Service wilderness ranger and the exhibit's coordinator. "Think of George Catlin, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran. Their work in the nineteenth century inspired early pride in America's wild landscapes and even influenced Congress to create our first parks."

Lydon says Alaska's wilderness artist residencies keep that tradition alive today.

Managers of parks, forests, and wildlife refuges know the inspirational value of art and have long hosted artist residencies at spectacular places across the country. But according to Lydon, recent Alaskan residencies have offered a twist.

Rather than hosting artists at cabins or lodges, where scenery is often the focus, recent artists have participated in wilderness stewardship projects as part of their residencies. Many of those in the exhibit joined agency specialists for a week or more in the field. They gathered marine debris, pulled invasive weeds, or assisted with research of wildlife, air quality, and climate change.

Often in very Alaskan weather, they hiked, paddled, and camped in some of America's wildest places. According to Lydon, they also learned that how we care for the land is often just as inspiring as the land itself, especially in an era facing climate change and other big challenges.

Additional Information and application materials for the Voices of the Wilderness—Artist-in-Residency Program: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/chugach/home/?cid=STELPRDB5347393>



Figure 2. As a 2011 artist-in-residence, Julie Denesha of Merriam, Kansas, photographs Dawes Glacier. Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness, Tongass National Forest.

Photo courtesy of Sean Reilly



Figure 3. Kathy Hodge of Providence, Rhode Island, paints in front of Surprise Glacier in Harriman Fiord as a 2011 artist-in-residence. Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area, Chugach National Forest.

Photo courtesy of Barbara Lydon



Figure 4. Oil painting entitled "Surprise" by Kathy Hodge of Providence, Rhode Island. Inspired by Surprise Glacier, Harriman Fiord. Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area, Chugach National Forest.

Photo courtesy of Kathy Hodge



Figure 5. "Wolf at the Door" was painted by Elaine Phillips, who was the 2013 artist-in-residence at Kobuk Valley National Park. Listen to an interview with the artist: <http://kdig.org/post/original-tapestry-debuts-dillingham>